



The Beacon

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Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

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bea- con (bê' ken) *noun*

A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or

RON'S CORNER

House and Senate Pass Agriculture Spending Bills

by Ron Hicks, Deputy Administrator
Office of Management

On Thursday, July 20, the Senate passed S.2536, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriation Act of 2001, which included an appropriation of \$678,011,000 for FSIS -- \$10.2 million below the President's budget request of \$688,204,000, but \$28.9 million above the FY 2000 appropriation. The companion House bill (H.R. 4461) was passed July 11, 2000, and included \$673,790,000 in funding for FSIS -- an amount \$14.4 million below the President's request, but \$24.7 million above the FY 2000 appropriation. Both bills provided funds for the 3.7 percent Federal pay raise scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2001.

The Senate bill authorizes that up to \$6 million of FY 2000 appropriated funds may be used to liquidate agency obligations from prior fiscal years. The House bill allows FSIS to use FY 2001 funds appropriated or otherwise made available to liquidate prior year obligations.

These differences, as well as amounts provided to fund Federal Food Inspection and several budget initiatives, will be reconciled by the House/Senate conference committee, which is not expected to

convene until September at the earliest. When the conference committee completes its work, a conference report will be returned to both the House and Senate for passage as a single bill to be sent to the President for signature. If a bill is not enacted by October 1, the start of the new fiscal year, then Congress can be expected to pass a continuing resolution allowing agencies to continue operating until a bill is signed into law.

If you have any questions about the FY 2001 budget, please contact Robert Tuverson in the Budget Formulation and Presentation Branch, Budget Division, on 202-720-4432.

New Office of Management Field Employees

by Don Musacchio, Assistant
Deputy Administrator
Office of Management

The Office of Management is pleased to announce the selection of two new employees who will be providing service to the FSIS field workforce.

Randy Wurtele recently was selected to assume the position of Labor Relations Specialist serving the Salem, Alameda, Boulder, and Minneapolis Districts, co-located with the Salem District Office. You can telephone him in Salem at 503-399-5831.

Prior to this, Randy served as a Consumer Safety Inspector and Food Inspector for 22 years. In

addition, he has represented the Western Council of Food Inspection Locals as Council President since January 1996, and prior to that was President, Local 1196 in Seattle, WA. Randy has fulfilled many roles as a member of the National Joint Council, and for the past three years has been the primary point of contact for presenting and receiving comments on proposed Agency initiatives. We welcome Randy to the Labor and Employee Relations Division.

Timothy Dial has been selected as the new Safety and Occupational Health Specialist serving the Des Moines, Chicago, Madison and Pickerington Districts and co-located with the Chicago District Office.

Tim is a former consumer safety inspector in the Chicago suburbs and has been with FSIS for over 20 years. Tim is assigned to the Administrative Services Division (ASD) and is responsible for the occupational safety and health program for Office of Field Operations' employees in the above districts. Tim can be reached at 630-620-7474, extension 228 or through Outlook. We welcome Tim to ASD's Environmental, Health and

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Safety Branch.

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Consumer Safety Officers and the FY 2001 Budget

by: Yvonne Davis, Chair
Workforce of the Future Steering Committee
Telephone: 202-720-4827

As mentioned in the budget article in *Ron's Corner*, both the House and the Senate have passed appropriations bills funding FSIS for Fiscal Year 2001 (October 1, 2000, through September 30, 2001).

However, the bills are not identical. For example, the House-passed version is silent on the issue of Consumer Safety Officers (CSOs); but the Senate version says "Although specifically not requested, funds are not provided for Consumer Safety Officers." However, there is also an amendment in the House version mandating inspection for ratites and squab. No funds would be appropriated for this, either. The House and Senate are not expected to work out their differences on the Agriculture Appropriations bill until September. FSIS would need to engage in impact and implementation bargaining with the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals (NJC) before implementing the new occupational series.

Given the above, it appears unlikely that FSIS will advertise any GS-696 Consumer Safety Officer positions before the close of Fiscal Year 2000, which ends September 30, 2000.

IDI Project Update

In February 2000, inspectors began performing in-distribution activities as part of the In-Distribution Inspection (IDI) Project. In June, based on safety concerns, in-distribution personnel were

temporarily moved to in-plant positions. The project team has defined additional training needs and is discussing these with the NJC. Additionally, the project team is developing a manual defining in-distribution analysis components.

VDIP

Delivering Bad News

by Milo Christianson
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Labor and Employee Relations Division

The recent events in California illustrate, in a tragic way, that occasionally our jobs can be dangerous. In the days and months ahead, the events that led to the deaths of our coworkers will be reviewed and re-reviewed to determine what, if anything, could have been done differently to have prevented this tragedy. Perhaps the answer to that question will be nothing. Some violent acts simply cannot be anticipated, prevented or understood.

Every day FSIS employees are required to deliver bad news to someone. It may be in the form of requiring compliance with laws and regulations designed to protect the public's health, as was the case in California, or it may simply involve the delivery of an unsatisfactory performance appraisal or some other administrative action. In all these cases, delivering bad news is not an option. We do, however, have some options in the way that we deliver such news. In this regard, some of the principles of conflict management may be helpful. When involved in a conflict situation, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- *Find Ways to Resolve Conflicts Collaboratively.* We discuss five conflict management styles in our Conflict Management

Workshop – all different and, under varying circumstances, all useful. These styles are *Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising* and *Collaborating*. In our work, we often resort to the "Competing" style." This style can best be described by the phrase "My Way or the Highway." The objective is to control or require a particular outcome, with limited involvement by the other party. It is quick, and it is absolutely necessary in emergency situations. It is not, however, the only style than can be effective when we are seeking control or compliance. Unless a true emergency exists, a "Collaborating" style may be more useful. When we collaborate, we find mutually acceptable solutions to problems. Even if, as in the case of regulatory compliance, true collaboration may not be possible, the collaborative approach can leave the other party feeling that their views have at least been heard and acknowledged.

- *Learn to Deal With Anger.* Many conflict situations involve varying degrees of anger. When we are involved in a conflict, it is very easy to be drawn into a cycle of escalating anger. Our tendency is often to react to anger with anger. But anger rarely solves problems, it usually just complicates them. The result is a diminished ability to communicate and, consequently, a diminished ability to fix the problem. There are alternatives. A discussion can, of course, simply be terminated. Sometimes just ending a conversation to allow for a "cooling off period" can be effective. This alternative is, of course, only a short term solution if a problem needs to be solved. Another approach may be to acknowledge the other person's feelings by saying something like, "I know

that you are angry, but we need to talk about solving this problem." By doing this, the conversation continues, but it is now refocused on the objective. This strategy may have to be repeated several times during a heated conversation to keep things on track. It is also productive to look for common interests – things that may be of mutual benefit to both/all parties. Finally, try to stay calm by taking a couple of deep breaths, a "time out," or by just exercising personal control.

- *Watch How You Say It.* How we give bad news will, to a large degree, influence how the listener reacts to it. Just our tone of voice, for example, can influence how a message is interpreted. If the listener interprets our tone to be aggressive or condescending, the likely result will be confrontation. In such cases, how news is delivered may be more important than its content.
- *Listen!* Listening may be the most important step we can take to build a good working relationship. Our failure to listen effectively is often one of the root causes of conflict. What we often find when mediating a dispute is that the parties simply have not listened to each other. When we deliver bad news, it is important that we listen carefully to what the others have to say, even if we disagree with them. For even if we cannot change an outcome, as is often the case in a regulatory environment, it is important that people feel that they are being heard.

There are many more issues to consider when dealing with conflicts or potential conflicts. Several weeks ago, we initiated a Conflict Management Workshop for supervisors. This Workshop was designed to teach the skill of conflict resolution. The Workshop has been presented at several field locations

since its introduction, and several more are scheduled for this fall. Managers who would like to schedule a Workshop for their district, laboratory or other facility, should contact Mr. Robert Zimmermann, Organization and Employee Development Branch, at 202-720-4937 (or by e-mail). Please indicate where you would like to hold the Workshop, some alternative dates for presentation, and approximately how many people will be attending.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Caring for the Caregiver

by *Beatriz Planas*

Human Resources Division

Telephone: 202-720-7983

An estimated 80 percent of the care received by elders in the United States is provided by family members. Are you one of the 22 million adults who provide care for elderly people in the United States?

You or someone you know may be taking care of an elder. If you are one of these adults in the "Sandwich generation", you have felt the joy of helping out someone you care about at the same time you have felt the guilt and frustration that often comes when there is only so much time to go around to all the priorities in your life. While caring for an elder, it is not unusual to experience physical and emotional exhaustion which may lead to the development of physical and/or psychological health problems. Taking care of a person is rewarding but it is always hard work, and doing it for a long period of time can be tiring. Some caregivers feel stressed, overwhelmed and burned out. These feelings may ultimately impact other areas of your personal or professional lives.

Look around and you will discover that you are not alone in the caregivers "burnout syndrome". Many of your colleagues are going

through the same things. It is important to know there are resources available for assistance with your caregiving issues. Through the auspices of the FSIS' Employee Assistance Program, Greenspring Health Services Inc. has an Elder Care Program designed to help you deal with everyday caregiving issues. The EAP can put you in touch with someone in your area who can help with your particular problem. Also, you may want to consider: talking to a professional (nurse, social worker, psychologist), or someone else trained to counsel on issues of concern to caregivers. You may also want to join a support group in your area, where you can share your experiences with others that are going through the same situation. By utilizing resources available to you in your caregiving role, you can step back, refocus and reenergize and ultimately may find new ways to help the elder that is important in your life.

Here are some resources that may be helpful to you in dealing with caregiving issues for the elderly:

- FSIS Employee Assistance Program (Greenspring Health Services). Call at 1-800-523-5668 (TDD: 1-800-882-7610).
- Elder Care Locator Call 1.800.677.1116. Monday – Friday/9am – 11pm
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). They will provide a Caregiver Resource Kit Free. Order Item #D15267 from AARP Fulfillment, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20091. You may also want to contact AARP about other resources available at a moderate cost.

If you would like more information regarding work flexibilities that may assist you in dealing with caring for an elder please contact Michele Clarke, the Work and Family Life Coordinator; Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch at 202-720-3880, by e-mail at michele.clarke@usda.gov or by mail

to Room 3817 South Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC, 20250-3700.

Deposit/Redeposit alert!

*by Human Resources Field Office
1-800-370-3747*

Deposit service occurs when your first appointment is on a temporary basis; that is, no retirement deductions are taken. Redeposit service occurs when you worked for the Government in a retirement-covered position, but then left and drew out those contributions. If you return to Government service, you owe a redeposit for that time. October 1, 1982, is a date with major impact on deposit and redeposit. Rules, which were more generous for deposit and redeposit service prior to that date, became much stricter after that date, particularly, in terms of service creditability and applicable interest rates. In addition, totally different rules apply to the new FERS Program. If you have service that falls into the deposit/redeposit realm, you may wish to contact your Servicing Personnel Office (SPO) for more information - Headquarters employees contact Washington, DC, HRD at 202-720-6617 and Field employees contact Minneapolis, MN, HRFO, Health and Benefits Section, at 612-370-2000 or Toll Free 1-800-370-3747.

U.S. Savings Bonds

When you file a change of address (AD-349), it will NOT change your savings bond address. This change should be made by completing an Authorization for Purchase and Request for Change, United States Savings Bonds, Series EE, SB-2152; or Series I, SB-2253. Check with your supervisor for these bond cards. You may also request the Series EE and Series I bond form through the Fax on Demand service (1-800-370-3747, ext. 2002). When ordering through the Fax on Demand, the index number for Series EE is 9402 and Series I is 9403. Completed forms are to be

directed to the Pay and Leave Unit in the Servicing Personnel Office (HRFO) in Minneapolis for field employees, and to HRD in Washington, DC, for headquarters employees.

Requests for Employment Verification

The Work Number for Everyone provides automated employment verification to assist employees in securing a loan, renting an apartment, etc. This service has security features, which ensure that information will be released only to those who have proper authorization. Each employee is responsible for authorizing the release of his or her employment and salary information.

The credit and reference verifiers must receive an authorization code from you to access your information. To obtain an authorization code call 1-800-EMP-AUTH (1-800-367-2884) (Do not give this 800 telephone number to verifiers.) You can have a maximum of three codes active at any one time. Each code can be used one time. Unused codes remain active for 6 months.

Access is controlled using a Personal Identification Number (PIN). The PIN number for USDA employees is the four-digit number signifying your month and day of birth (e.g., if your birthday is September 24, your PIN is 0924). The use of this PIN, combined with your social security number and the USDA Employer Code, 10284, gives you control over who can obtain your employment and salary information.

To access your employment information, the verifier should call 1-900-555-WORK (1-900-555-9675). They will need your authorization code; USDA's company code (10284) and your social security number.

The service is available 7 days a week during the following hours:

7:00 a.m. until 12:00 midnight (EST)
6:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. (CST)
5:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. (MT)
4:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. (PT)

The Human Resources Field Office (HRFO) is also available to respond to written and verbal requests for employment verification. These requests are completed based on information from the employee's official record. To expedite processing of these requests, employees should furnish the following address to requestors:

USDA, FSIS
Human Resources Field Office
Butler Square West, 4th Floor
100 North Sixth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403

All unemployment inquiries should be directed to James E. Frick, Inc., P.O. Box 66945, St. Louis, MO 63133. Their toll free number is 1-800-366-6660.

Family Friendly Sick Leave Is Expanded!

This is to let employees know that the Office of Personnel Management has issued revised regulations governing the use of Family Friendly Sick Leave. The regulations became effective on June 20, 2000. The new regulations expand the use of sick leave to care for family members with serious health conditions to up to 480 hours per year. The expanded use of sick leave is intended to parallel employee entitlements under the Family and Medical Leave Act which permits employees to use up to 480 hours of leave without pay (LWOP) for serious health conditions.

Most of the basic provisions of the original program remain the same. For example, full-time employees may use up to 40 hours of accrued sick leave per leave year for general family care and bereavement purposes. This includes taking a family member to a doctor

appointment, attending to a family member who has a short-term illness, making funeral arrangements for a family member, and attending the funeral of a family member. Just as before, employees who are able to retain 80 hours of sick leave in their leave accounts, may use up to an additional 64 hours of accrued sick leave for these purposes for a total of 104 hours per leave year.

The primary change relates to expanded use of sick leave to care for family members with serious health conditions. Employees may now use the initial 40 hours of sick leave. Plus, when a balance of 80 hours of sick leave is maintained, up to an additional 440 hours of accrued sick leave may be used to care for a family member who has a serious health condition. Thus, employees can potentially use up to a total amount of 480 hours (or 12 weeks) of sick leave per leave year for a serious family health condition. A serious health condition includes such illnesses as: cancer, heart attack, stroke, severe injuries, Alzheimer's disease, pregnancy and childbirth, etc. This is not intended to cover short-term conditions for which treatment and recovery are very brief.

The program has certain limitations. If an employee previously used any portion of the 104 hours of sick leave for general care or bereavement purposes, that amount must be deducted from the 480-hour yearly entitlement should an employee need to be absent from work to care for a family member with serious health condition. Also, if an employee used 480 hours of sick leave for a family member's serious health condition, he/she may not use an additional 104 hours of sick leave for general family and bereavement purposes within the same year. The employee would have to use annual leave or LWOP.

In other words, an employee is entitled to a maximum of 480 hours of his/her accrued sick leave each

year for all family sick leave purposes. Employees may continue to use an unlimited amount of accrued sick leave for personal medical treatments and conditions.

Up to 40 hours of sick leave may be advanced to employees for general family, bereavement, and serious family health reasons, who do not have any accrued sick leave. Supporting medical documentation is required for advance sick leave. Part-time employees may use the entitlement on a pro-rated basis. The use of family sick leave should continue to be annotated on the time and attendance record with transaction code 62-62 and a brief statement in the Remarks Section. Until the National Finance Center updates the payroll system to track the use of family sick leave, employees and supervisors will need to keep a record of the number of hours used for the different purposes.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Classification and Compensation Branch, Human Resources Division at 202-720-6287.

Expanded Use of Family Sick Leave-Questions and Answers (July 10, 2000)

Q. How will this new sick leave policy benefit Federal employees?

A. Full time Federal employees will now be permitted to use a total of up to 12 weeks (480 hours) of sick leave each year to care for a family member with a serious health condition.

Q. Is this a new category of leave—i.e., "Sick leave for family care?"

A. No. Sick leave used for family care is charged against a person's accrued sick leave balance.

Q. Who is covered by the new sick leave policy?

A. Employees who are covered by the Federal annual and sick leave systems are covered by this new policy. (See 5 U.S.C. 6301.) This includes all FSIS employees who currently accrue annual and sick leave. Unfortunately, it does not cover intermittent employees.

Q. Are part-time employees eligible for family sick leave?"

A. Yes, part-time employees are eligible to use the family sick leave entitlement. The amount of sick leave that may be used is prorated based on the number of hours of the scheduled tour of duty as well as the accrued sick leave balance.

Q. What are some examples of a "serious health condition?"

A. Examples of "serious health conditions" include, but are not limited to, heart attacks, heart conditions requiring heart bypass or valve operations, cancers, back conditions requiring extensive therapy or surgical procedures, kidney dialysis, conditions requiring physical therapy, strokes, severe respiratory conditions, spinal injuries, appendicitis, pneumonia, emphysema, severe arthritis, severe nervous disorders, injuries caused by serious accidents on or off the job, clinical depression, recovery from major surgery, final stages of a terminal illness, and Alzheimer's disease.

A "serious health condition" also includes ongoing pregnancy, miscarriages, complications or illnesses related to pregnancy (such as severe morning sickness), the need for prenatal care, childbirth, and recovery from childbirth.

Q. Who is considered a "family member?"

A. "Family member" means the following relatives of the employee:

a. Spouse, and parents thereof;

- b. Children, including adopted children, and spouses thereof;
- c. Parents;
- d. Brothers and sisters, and spouses thereof; and
- e. Any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.

Q. Who determines who is a "family member?"

A. Managers and supervisors must use their judgment in applying this definition, consistent with Agency guidance contained in pertinent notices and directives and the National Basic Agreement.

Q. How broadly should managers and supervisors define "family member?"

A. This benefit is intended to be "family friendly" and to permit employees to care for individuals outside the traditional nuclear family. OPM's regulations governing the leave share programs and sick leave for family care are intended to address the needs of employees struggling to manage child care, elder care, family emergencies, and other personal responsibilities, while at the same time allowing them to handle their professional responsibilities. This definition recognizes that in today's society there are both traditional and nontraditional families and that the responsibilities placed on the employee are the same in both cases.

Q. What are the requirements for using sick leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition?

A. Employees must maintain a sick leave balance of 80 hours in order to use the full 12 weeks/480 hours of sick leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition. Any full-time employee may use an initial 40 hours of sick leave for family care purposes. To use more than 40 hours, an

employee must maintain a sick leave balance of 80 hours at all times. This limitation applies to any employee using sick leave to care for a family member.

Q. Will employees be required to provide medical certification of a family member's serious health condition?

A. For any use of sick leave, a supervisor may require medical certification or other "administratively acceptable evidence" consistent with the FSIS Leave Directive 4630.2, or the Basic Agreement. In addition, the final regulations permit agencies to establish a time limit for employees to produce such documentation. Additional information will be provided in an FSIS Notice.

Q. How is the new sick leave policy different from the current policy on using sick leave for family care purposes?

A. Most Federal employees may use a total of up to 104 hours of sick leave each year for family care and bereavement purposes. The expanded regulations permit employees to use a total of up to 480 hours of sick leave each year to care for a family member with a serious health condition. The circumstances under which employees may use more than 104 hours of sick leave therefore are more limited. This benefit will broaden the options available for employees to meet their family responsibilities. Mothers, fathers, and grandparents (who are raising their grandchildren), and employees caring for their spouses, siblings, or parents will all greatly benefit from this more generous leave benefit. This benefit also will address the dilemmas faced by parents of special needs children when trying to balance their work and family responsibilities.

Q. Are employees entitled to use 104 hours of sick leave for general family care or bereavement

purposes plus 480 hours of sick leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition each year?

A. No. If an employee previously has used any portion of the 104 hours days of sick leave for general family care or bereavement purposes in a year, that amount must be subtracted from the 480-hour entitlement. If an employee has already used 480 hours of sick leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition, he or she cannot use an additional 104 hours in the same year for general family care purposes. Assuming that the employee maintains a balance of 80 hours of sick leave, he/she is entitled to use up to a maximum of 480 hours of sick leave each year for all family care purposes.

Example:

Jo Ann has 840 hours of accrued sick leave. She used 50 hours of sick leave earlier this leave year to care for her daughter who had chicken pox. Last week, Jo Ann's mother-in-law underwent emergency heart surgery and will need constant care for several weeks. Jo Ann may use up to a maximum of 430 hours (480 hour maximum entitlement minus 50 hours already used for family care purposes) to care for her mother-in-law as she recuperates. Jo Ann must maintain 80 hours of sick leave in her account at all times.

Q. Can a pregnant employee use sick leave for childbirth and to care for her newborn?

A. Pregnant employees are entitled to use sick leave for prenatal and postnatal medical appointments and any periods of incapacitation as a result of pregnancy and childbirth. The amount of sick leave needed may vary depending on the particular situation. Uncomplicated pregnancies usually require a recuperation period of about 6 weeks. Complicated conditions may require additional sick leave for incapacitation and recovery. In

addition, so long as the new mother maintains a sick leave balance of 80 hours, she may use up to 104 hours of sick leave for well baby appointments and to care for a newborn child during minor illnesses.

Under the final regulations, a new mother may use a total of up to 480 hours of sick leave to care for a newborn child with a serious health condition. If the new mother has already used 104 hours of sick leave for family care purposes, she will be entitled to use the balance of the 480-hour entitlement to sick leave. A new mother may not use sick leave to bond with or care for a healthy newborn or to make childcare arrangements. For these purposes, a new mother is entitled to use up to 12 weeks of leave without pay under FSIS Directive 4630.6, the Family and Medical Leave Program (FMLA), for childbirth and care of a healthy newborn. Unpaid leave under the FMLA must be used within 1 year following the date of birth.

Q. Can a biological father use sick leave for childbirth and care of his newborn?

A. A biological father is entitled to use sick leave to care for the biological mother for any medical period (up to a maximum of 480 hours) during which she is incapacitated as a result of pregnancy and childbirth. This includes prenatal and postnatal doctor's examinations, hospitalization, and recovery from childbirth. In addition, in an uncomplicated pregnancy, so long as the new father maintains a sick leave balance of 80 hours, he may use a total of up to 104 hours of sick leave for well baby appointments and to care for the newborn during minor illnesses.

In a complicated pregnancy, if the newborn or mother has a serious health condition, the father may use the 480-hour entitlement to care for that child or the mother. A new

father may not use sick leave to bond with or care for a healthy newborn or to make childcare arrangements. For these purposes, a new father is entitled to use up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the FMLA to care for his healthy newborn and may substitute annual leave for FMLA leave without pay.

Q. Can a biological mother or father use 480 hours of sick leave to care for a healthy newborn?

A. No. By law, an employee may use sick leave only for periods of sickness. OPM has no authority to permit employees to use sick leave for purposes other than those permitted by law. A new parent may use a total of up to 480 hours of sick leave to care for a newborn child with a serious health condition. He or she may use annual leave or leave without pay to care for a healthy newborn.

Q. Are the regulations retroactive? If so, can employees who have already used LWOP or annual leave to care for family members with serious health conditions change their leave charges to accrued sick leave?

A. No. Unfortunately, the regulations were not made effective on a retroactive basis.

Dealing with Unsatisfactory Performance

Supervisors are responsible for establishing and communicating performance elements and standards with their employees. When an employee's performance does not meet the established "fully successful" performance standards in one or more critical elements, appropriate action must be taken to notify the employee of the unacceptable performance and assist the employee in improving performance. Help is readily available to assist supervisors in dealing with performance problems. You may call any of the field Employee Relations Specialists, the

Employee Relations Specialists in Minneapolis (1-800-370-3747) or in Washington (1-800-217-1886). They will help to assure that the appropriate Agency procedures are followed, including those contained in the National Basic Agreement for bargaining unit employees. It is preferable that you make contact early, when performance problems are easier to deal with. The ultimate goal, of course, is to help the employee become a good performer.

The FSIS Employee Suggestion Program

As we all know, the Agency has undergone many changes in the last few years, including a change in organizational structure. The former regional and area offices were consolidated into districts and the personnel functions were consolidated into the Human Resources Division located in Minneapolis and Washington. With the consolidation of personnel functions, there was no longer a "processing office" to route the employee suggestions through. In addition, some suggesters had already asked if a suggestion could be submitted from the circuit level or directly to Washington, DC. Since we wanted to improve the timeliness in response to suggesters by minimizing the steps a suggestion had to go through before it reached the appropriate evaluating official here in Washington, HRD accepted any suggestions sent directly to us for processing.

As a result, employee suggestions are sometimes submitted by the suggester through the circuit to the District office and then into Washington, DC, and sometimes they are submitted by the suggester directly to Washington, DC, to the Performance, Evaluation and Recognition Branch (PERB), Human Resources Division (Room 3817 South Building, 14th and Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250). PERB has responsibility for administering the

program and tracks the status of suggestions.

Employee Suggestion, Form AD-287, can be sent directly to Headquarters in Washington via electronic mail (using FormFlow), fax (202-690-2773), or hard copy (at the address mentioned above). Once the suggestion is received, it is assigned a number, referred to evaluating officials, and an acknowledgement is sent to the suggester's residence address. After evaluating officials comment and a decision is made to adopt or not adopt, a response is prepared and sent to the suggester from the appropriate Deputy Administrator. If the response conveys a non-adoption decision, it is sent directly to the employee's home address with a copy to the District Manager or the program's administrative office. If the suggestion is adopted, the Deputy Administrator's response is sent to the District Manager, the Division Director or the Center Director, through channels, to the employee in order that an appropriate presentation of the award can be made whenever possible.

An employee suggestion represents an idea offered to improve the efficiency and/or economy of day-to-day operations. Employees are encouraged to submit suggestions that produce a cost savings to the Agency. As we face continued budgetary challenges, it is an opportunity for all FSIS employees to look for less costly alternatives to carry out the Agency's mission. Employees whose ideas save the Agency money are rewarded with a percentage of the measurable (tangible) benefits to the government in accordance with FSIS policy outlined in Directive 4451.1.

Leave Transfer Recipients

1. Jackie Copeland
OFO, DC; Illness
2. Annie Stewart
POB, MN; Serious Illness

3. Linda Cole
OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness
4. Sonya West
OPPDE, DC; Maternity
5. Joyce Schultz
POB, MN; Serious Illness
6. Stephanie Showell
OFO, DE; Family Illness
7. Linda Carey
EMS, DC; Surgery
8. George Olson
OFO, MN; Family Illness
9. Marilyn Weber
FPC, IA; Illness
10. Robert Martz
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
11. Betty Morgan
OFO, AR; Family Illness
12. Carolyn Woolfolk
OFO, DC; Surgery
13. OFO-99-0027
OFO, NC; Surgery
14. Theresa Spoering
OFO, MN; Surgery
15. Tammy Love
OFO, AR; Surgery
16. Sue Engels
OFO, IA; Family Illness
17. Nicole Wareham
OFO, IN; Maternity
18. Aurbrey Tribble
OFO, FL; Serious Illness
19. Jacqueline Bonner
OFO, AL; Surgery
20. John French
OFO, GA; Family Illness
21. Victor Varnadoe
OFO, OH; Family Illness
22. OFO-99-0049
OFO, MA; Surgery
23. Tommie Olson
OFO, NE; Surgery
24. Clement Grangier
OFO, MD; Serious Illness
25. OFO-99-0047
OFO, IA; Surgery
26. Mark Spear
OFO, AL; Surgery
27. Dunita Harris
OFO, TX; Maternity
28. James Layman
OFO, OH; Serious Illness
29. Karen Wesson
OFO, DC; Surgery
30. Brandy Blevins
OFO, CA; Serious Illness
31. Vandora Hampton
OFO, VA; Serious Illness
32. OFO-00-0006

- OFO, AL, Illness
33. Madge Stone
OFO, DC; Family Illness
34. Carmen Torrent
FSE, DC, Illness
35. OFO-00-0007
OFO, AL; Surgery
36. Jamie Zysset
FO, KS; Maternity
37. OFO-00-0010
OFO, GA
38. Gordon Jones
OFO, TN; Serious Illness
39. Randy Haggard
OFO, TX; Serious illness
40. Vickie Allen
OFO, CA, Serious Illness
41. OFO-AL-0013
OFO, AL, Serious Illness
42. John Buscemi
OM, DC; Surgery
43. Andy Sandoval
OFO, TX; Serious Illness
44. Robert Butler
OFO, MS; Surgery
45. Ralph Bowen
OFO, NE; Serious Illness
46. Deana Hall
OFO, AR; Maternity.
47. Frankie Beacorn
FO-OO-0020
48. Judith Terry
OFO, AL; Serious Illness
49. OFO-00-0022
OFO, MI; Serious Illness
50. Earnestine Smitherman
OFO, TX; Surgery
51. Chang Choi
OFO, IL; Surgery
52. Cynthia Sherman
OFO, DC; Serious Illness
53. Thomas Gorka
OFO, IL; Serious Illness
54. Eusebio Galindo
OFO, TX; Serious Illness
55. Denise Barnes
OFO, DC; Surgery
56. Luan Hamar
OFO, CA; Surgery

*While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers if they choose so that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources

Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

June/July Retirements

James E. Bagwell, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Smithfield, VA, 06/30/00, 30 Years

Lee Bonney, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Anaheim, CA, 06/30/00, 39 Years

Robert E. Burke, Jr., Writ Edit, OFO, College Station, TX, 07/03/00, 31 Years

Sally J. Chandler, FI, OFO, Forest, MS, 06/30/00, 25 Years

Raymond W. Dudek, Compliance Offcr, OFO, New York (Queens), NY, 07/03/00, 34 Years

Robert H. Earl, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Boise, ID, 06/30/00, 32 Years

Richard J. Grzeskiewicz, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Rio Grande, NJ, 07/01/00, 38 Years

JoAnn Harris, Admv Asst, OFO, St. Louis, MO, 06/30/00, 36 Years

Emily M. Horseman, FI, OFO, Cordova, MD, 07/01/00, 18 Years

Michael P. McDonough, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Brockton, MA, 06/30/00, 31 Years

Fred R. Nekola, FI, OFO, Waterloo, IA, 06/30/00, 9 Years

Richard D. Parmenter, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Canton, GA, 07/01/00, 11 Years

Michael D. Parmentier, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Green Bay, WI, 07/01/00, 32 Years

Buddie M. Robnett, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Lockney, TX, 07/01/00, 23 Years

Lynn Scantling, FI, OFO, Waldron, AR, 06/17/00, 6 Years

Roxie A.D. Sheppard, FI, OFO, Accomac, VA, 06/08/00, 30 Years

Charles C. Snyder, FI, OFO, Moorefield, WV, 06/30/00, 20 Years

Martin Szekeresh, Compliance Offcr, OFO, Washington, DC, 06/30/00, 33 Years

Joseph Toraine, FI, OFO, Mount Olive, NC, 07/01/00, 26 Years

Sene Vinaya, Computer Specialist, Washington, DC, 06/30/00, 10 Years

John L. Walch, VMO, OFO, Bryon, MN, 06/30/00, 9 Years

Roy C. Webster, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Cincinnati, OH, 35 Years

Wanda J. White, FI, OFO, Selbyville, DE, 06/17/00, 11 Years

VEHICLES

Rising Fuel Costs

by Pete Bridgeman

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4222

If you are a GSA Vehicle driver, please read this letter from William Webster, Director of GSA's Fleet Management Division:

Dear GSA Fleet Customer:

It is certainly no news to anyone that gasoline prices have been soaring for the past several months. One of the benefits that GSA Fleet provides is to insulate our customer (agencies) from such price fluctuations. Each GSA Fleet vehicle comes with a Fleet Services Card with which drivers purchase the fuel they need. GSA is invoiced for those bills and pays them with revenue generated by the fixed monthly and mileage rates you pay. Although our costs rise and fall, sometimes quite dramatically, your cost to use GSA Fleet vehicles remains stable. This allows you to budget your fleet expenditures, while GSA takes most of the risk of price instability.

In normal times, the rise and fall of gasoline prices is moderate, and easily contained within our rate structure. The last time we were unable to do so was during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1991. From January to June of that year, we were forced to add a special fuel surcharge to our mileage rates.

The recent extraordinary volatility in the petroleum market has again seriously strained our ability to absorb rapidly rising costs. A sustained increase of just a penny per gallon can mean an additional \$1 million annual expense for GSA Fleet! However, based on the latest forecasts, we believe that prices will begin to moderate soon. If the projections are correct, we will be able to hold the line. Although even the newly projected decline in gasoline prices places our expense level at the very upper limit of what we can handle within our existing rates, we will do everything in our power to hold the line on other expenses, and avoid an unplanned, disruptive increase in GSA Fleet rates.

We ask that you do your part, as well. Please refuel at the self-serve pump whenever possible, and avoid the use of gasoline with a higher octance than your vehicle requires. Strict adherence to the preventive maintenance notices you receive will help ensure optimum fuel efficiency.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation. We at GSA Fleet value you, our customers, and remain committed to providing you the best fleet services anywhere, at the lowest possible cost.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Report of Alleged Safety or Health Hazard

by Roger Perkerewicz

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 303-497-5411, x-247

FSIS Form 4791-27 Replaces MP 431 and FSIS Form 4791-1, which are obsolete. FSIS employees work in a variety of workplaces both Government-owned or leased and private sector meat, poultry, and egg products plants. These environments may expose Agency employees to occupational safety

and health hazards. When an employee observes a safety or health hazard, the employee should first take the necessary measures to protect him or herself and then contact the immediate supervisor or official-in charge with details of the hazard. FSIS encourages employees first to report safety and health hazards verbally or in writing to the immediate supervisor for prompt resolution. Verbal reports should be followed by a completed FSIS Form 4791-27. Report an imminent danger or serious hazard promptly to the supervisor by telephone or the most expeditious means available. Attempt informal resolution of hazards that are not imminent danger.

The supervisor: evaluates all oral and written reports of hazardous conditions; determines when an inspection or investigation of the hazardous condition is required; conducts the investigation of the alleged condition; contacts the plant management to discuss the hazardous condition and corrective measures; and develops a written abatement plan when corrective action will not be completed within 30 days. The supervisor requests assistance from line officials and the Workplace Safety and Occupational Health Official (WSHO) (the Field Safety and Health Specialist assigned to your District) when resources and technical advice are required to respond to FSIS Form 4791-27.

All reports should follow the chain of command to the WSHO to determine if abatement action is appropriate for the hazard and that all supervisors are aware of hazards. Information and instruction for completing FSIS Form 4791-27

are found in FSIS Directive 4791.12 Reporting of Hazards.

Multi-District Safety Poster Contest

*by Harry Thompson
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 214-767-9142, x-896*

During the Multi-District Safety Committee meeting for the districts of Dallas, Springdale, and Lawrence, conducted on May 9-10, 2000 in Shreveport, LA, the Multi-District Safety Poster contest was held. Members of the Multi-District Safety Committee judged the posters submitted and selected one winner from each District.

Winners from the Safety Poster Contest are:

Daniel R. Woerner, Dallas District
Fred Steuart, Lawrence District
Clifford R. Donnell, Springdale District

Each winner will be presented with an eight-hour time-off award and certificate. The winning posters are published in Attachment 1 to this issue of the *Beacon*.

ISSUANCES

Recent Agency Issuances

*by Corinne Calhoun
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4233*

The following notices and directive have been issued since the July 2000 edition of *The Beacon*. Many recent issuances are available in an electronic format from the "PCDIALS" library in Opendesk and from the "Agency Issuances" public

folder in the Exchange mail system (Outlook).

Notice 21-00 (6/22/00)
Standards and Procedures for
Obtaining Business Cards

Notice 22-00 (7/6/00)
Travel Services for Field Employees

Notice 23-00 (7/6/00)
Contract Change for Travel
Services

Notice 24-00 (7/13/00)
Clarification of Cattle Residue
Testing Procedures

Directive 2100.1, Revision 4
(6/26/00)
Procurement of Supplies,
Equipment, and Services

Directives and notices are distributed automatically to applicable Agency employees and offices. Additional copies are available from:

USDA FSIS ASD P&DS
MAILDROP 5241
5601 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE
BELTSVILLE MD 20705-5241

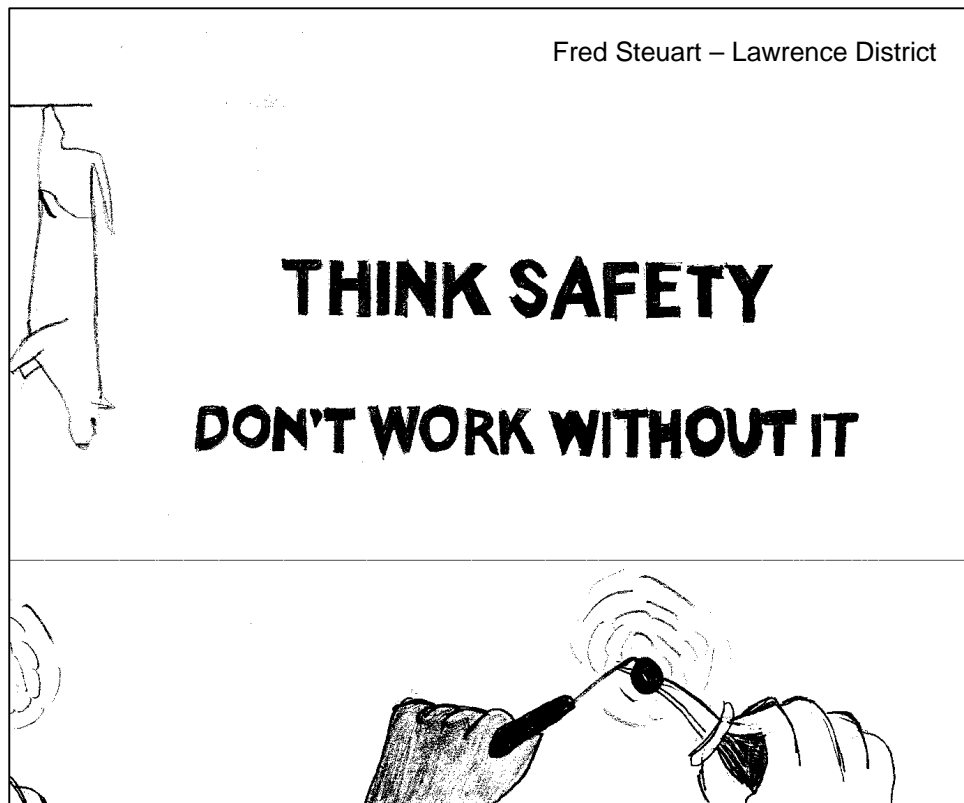
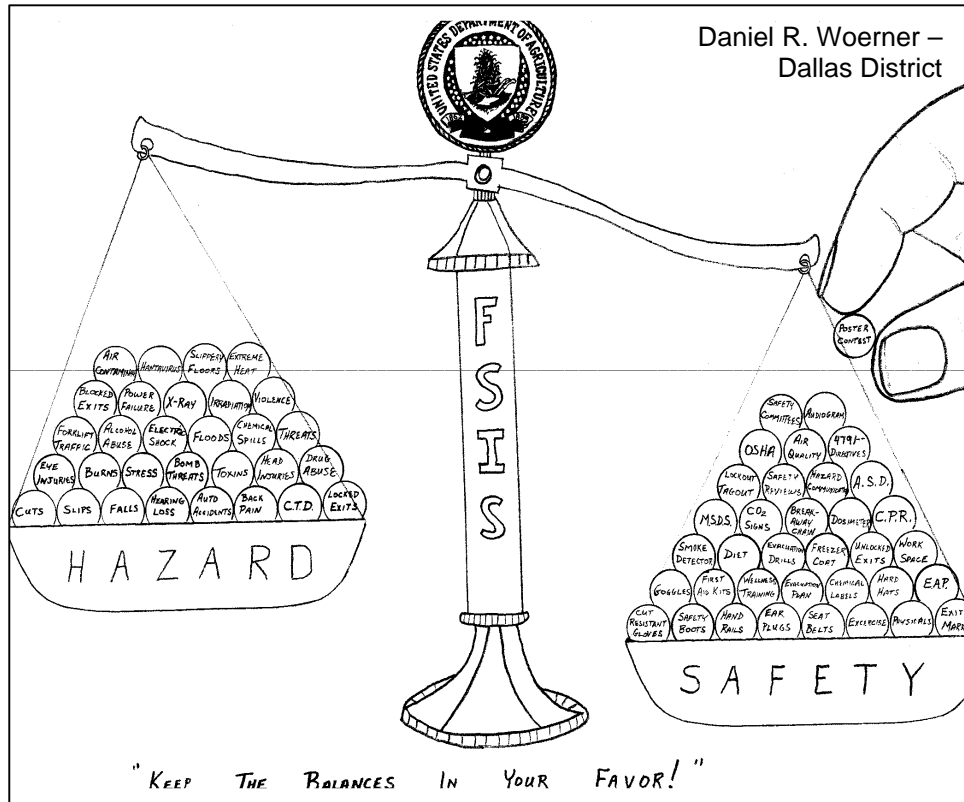
Telephone: 301-504-4242
Fax: 301-504-4277

To comment on this newsletter or to submit an article for publication, please contact:

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Editor, *The Beacon*
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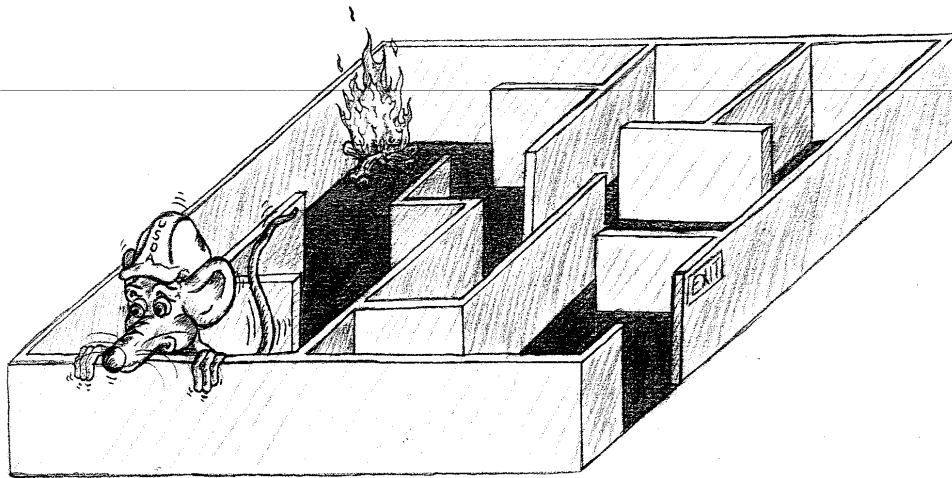
The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically in the "Newsletters" public folder on the Exchange (Outlook) mail system as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

ATTACHMENT 1



Clifford R. Donnell –
Springdale District

*Plant look like a maze?
Know your emergency evacuation plan*



ATTACHMENT 2

C, F, and G Fund Monthly Returns
July 10, 2000

Months	C Fund	S&P 500 Stock Index	F Fund	Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate Bond Index	G Fund
1995 (Jan. - Dec.)	37.41%	37.58%	18.31%	18.47%	7.03%
1996 (Jan. - Dec.)	22.85%	22.96%	3.66%	3.63%	6.76%
1997 (Jan. - Dec.)	33.17%	33.36%	9.60%	9.65%	6.77%
1998 (Jan. - Dec.)	28.44%	28.58%	8.70%	8.69%	5.74%
1999 (Jan. - Dec.)	20.95%	21.04%	(0.85%)	(0.82%)	5.99%
1999	%	%	%	%	%
April	3.86	3.87	.29	.32	.46
May	(2.36)	(2.36)	(0.89)	(0.88)	.47
June	5.54	5.55	(0.33)	(0.32)	.49
July	(3.14)	(3.12)	(0.43)	(0.42)	.52
August	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.05)	(0.05)	.53
September	(2.78)	(2.74)	1.15	1.16	.51
October	6.34	6.33	.38	.37	.53
November	2.00	2.03	(0.01)	(0.01)	.51
December	5.90	5.89	(0.45)	(0.48)	.54
2000					
January	(5.03)	(5.02)	(0.34)	(0.33)	.56
February	(1.93)	(1.89)	1.22	1.21	.53
March	9.74	9.78	1.32	1.32	.55
April	(2.98)	(3.01)	(0.29)	(0.29)	.52
May	(2.05)	(2.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)	.54
June	2.44	2.47	2.07	2.08	.53
Last 12 Months *	7.11	7.25	4.61	4.57	6.55

Percentages in () are negative.

The C Fund is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund, which tracks the S&P 500 stock index. The F Fund is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund, which tracks the Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate bond index. The G Fund is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities.